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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter **Van De Velde** (Belgium)

III. Translation- and interpretation-related matters

B. Utilization of new technologies

Introduction and overview

1. In section D, paragraph 1, of its resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue the efforts to utilize new technologies, such as computer-assisted translation, remote translation, terminology databases and speech recognition, in the six official languages so as to enhance further the productivity of conferences, and to keep the General Assembly informed of the introduction and use of any other new technology.

2. At its 430th meeting, on 7 August 2000, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the utilization of new technologies (A/AC.172/2000/5).

Discussion

3. Attention was drawn to the ongoing technology projects in computer-assisted translation, remote translation, speech recognition, terminology databases, electronic referencing and use of digital audio recording technology, and to the fact that, although investment and maintenance costs (procurement and maintenance of software licences, contracting of training and technical support services) were modest, technology projects entailed hidden costs to the Organization in terms of staff time spent on training, software customization and file processing or conversion.

4. The hope was expressed that future reports of the Secretary-General on this subject would contain more reporting on coordination in the area of technological innovation. Clarification was sought regarding the suggestion in paragraph 18 of the

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report of the Secretary-General that proximity might be one of the criteria for the allocation of remote translation responsibilities. Information was also sought about the feasibility of using File Transfer Protocol (FTP) sites at duty stations other than Headquarters and the United Nations Office at Geneva.

5. Some members were impressed by the level of in-house expertise and wondered whether any tangible recognition was given to these skills. Additional information was sought with regard to the possible hidden costs of remote translation.

6. In response to the questions posed, the representative of the Secretariat said that the references to coordination in the report had deliberately been kept vague so that the various duty stations could themselves report on their experiences and initiatives. The Organization had no formal system in place to reward linguists who developed expertise in particular areas of technology. The hidden costs of remote translation consisted mainly of the cost of transmittal of the documents and was therefore very modest. FTP technology could be implemented at minimal cost at other conference-servicing centres involved in remote translation.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. The Committee on Conferences welcomed the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General and the efforts that were being made to introduce new technologies in the area of conference services.

8. The Committee encouraged the Secretary-General to continue those efforts and requested that the Committee be kept informed of the progress made.

9. The Committee welcomed the proposal to extend the service of dedicated FTP sites to other conference centres, in view of the greater speed and reliability which they offered and their low cost.